Technology and Religion Seminars
The Marshall McLuhan Initiative at St Paul’s College, University of Manitoba

**Surfing the Divine: McLuhan looks at Religion looks at McLuhan**

The Internet and Prayer

FACT SHEET

Technology and Religion seminars are sponsored by The Marshall McLuhan Initiative at St. Paul’s College at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.

**The Marshall McLuhan Initiative** consists of:

- **Probes** – into the influences, nature and effects of communications and other technologies, particularly but not exclusively with regard to religious practice
- **Seminars** – on campus and online exploration of the connections between a specific technology and a particular religious practice
- **Forums** – free, open, online discussion of observations discovered by means of Probes, Seminars and ongoing research
- **Ongoing research** – through popular and scholarly articles, reviews and presentations – into the effects of using McLuhan’s probes to better understand our mediated world.

The Initiative is inspired by a commitment to honour, celebrate, and extend the life’s work of Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911 – 1980), who grew up in Winnipeg, graduated from the University of Manitoba, and became a professor of English literature, prophetic poet, satirist and renowned communications theorist/visionary and media commentator.

Recognizing that religious faith played a determining role in Marshall McLuhan’s life and work, the Initiative explores how his observations (“percepts”) of the social effects of technology can help us better understand the communicative aspects of Christianity and other major religions.

In particular, drawing on methods of enquiry used extensively by Marshall McLuhan, the Initiative probes the relationship between specific communications technologies and particular religious practices. Four of McLuhan’s primary notions underpin the probes:

- The Laws of Media
- The Medium is the Message
- The relationship between Figure and Ground
- The Global Village
Seminars probe the effects of communications technology on common religious practices. The first seminar, in 2009, *What is the microphone doing at Church?* probed the effects of microphones and sound systems on religious rituals and liturgies.

The upcoming seminar, *Surfing the Divine: McLuhan Looks at Religion Looks at McLuhan*, probes the relationship between the Internet and Prayer. It is offered in two versions:

- **On Campus** – 7 May 2011 – a technologically hybrid format featuring 10 contributors from around the world facilitated by a prominent Wall Street technology strategist
- **Online** – premiering 11 July 2011 – the same 10 featured contributors interacting with each other and with an unlimited number of registered online participants.

The seminar probes questions such as these: How does the Internet affect the manner and time in which people pray, alone and in community? Does it expose people to new forms of prayer, new ways of praying? Or does it distract people away from prayer? Does the Internet build community, which is essential to communal prayer? Or does it isolate people and make them more introverted and self-centered? Has the Internet, itself, become a medium or an object of prayer? If the Internet, as a technology, is an extension of humanity’s inclination towards communion with the Divine, which characteristics of the Internet can be regarded as prayerful?

Although, as a devout Christian, McLuhan explored the communicative dimensions of faith, and observed society and its technologies from a religious perspective, he was a trained theologian. Therefore, the seminars explore religion and technology through two lenses, McLuhan’s and, to a lesser extent, those of Bernard Lonergan. Also a Canadian, and a contemporary of McLuhan’s, Lonergan was primarily a philosopher whose primary interest was epistemology – studying how humans acquire knowledge and insight.

The overall character of the seminars is Catholic and ecumenically Christian but it is open and likely to be of interest to adherents of other religions and to those who may be indifferent or antagonistic to religious practice and organized religion.

Participants in the initial On Campus seminar will be people living in or near Winnipeg and from other parts of North America. Participants in the Online version will be Internet users around the world. Specifically, the seminar is designed for:

- **Religious practitioners** – people who pray (online or offline, alone or in groups); people involved or interested in ministry, pastoral work and/or theology; primarily Christian but also people of other faith traditions
- **Technological thinkers** – people who are interested in exploring the social effects of new technologies
- **Communications specialists** – people in media and academe who are contemplating the still untapped potential of the Internet and its related electronic technologies
- *Intellectuals and others* – individuals, not necessarily academics, who are interested in ideas and the latest developments of modern society and/or curious about the juxtaposition of two topics that do not, on the surface, seem to be related to each other.

**Contributors** to the upcoming seminar represent a broad array of perspectives:

**Electronics and Faith**

- **Nora Young**
  Host and Creator, *Spark*, CBC Radio, Toronto
  Technologically mediated self-awareness

- **Rev. Thomas M Rosica, CSB**
  CEO, Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation, Toronto
  The potential and the limits of “electronic faith”

- **Anthony G Roman**
  University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines
  Cellphones, texting and religious practice

- **Patrick Leinen**
  Co-Founder and Project Manager, Little iApps, South Bend, IN
  Confession: a Roman Catholic App

**Prayer**

- **Sr. Mary Coswin, OSB**
  Director, St. Benedict’s Retreat and Conference Centre, Winnipeg
  What is prayer, who does it, why, and how?

- **Rev. Capt. Mario Gaulin**
  Baptist minister and Chaplain, Canadian Forces, Air Command
  Can we connect with God, and God with us, through technology?

**McLuhan**

- **Thomas W Cooper, PhD**
  Professor, Visual and Media Arts, Emerson College, Boston
  The Medium Is the Mass: Marshall McLuhan’s Catholicism

- **Eric McLuhan, PhD**
  Director, Media Studies, Harris Institute for the Arts, Toronto
  Marshall McLuhan’s Faith, Probes, and Laws of Media

**Lonergan**

- **Gerard K Whelan, SJ**
  Professor, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome
  Communication, inculturation, and mutual self appropriation

- **Ian B Bell, PhD**
  Assist. Professor, Religious Studies, Siena Heights University, Michigan
  Is spiritual communion possible when people are only “in some way present” to each other?
Seminar

Howard R Engel  Founder and Assistant Director, The Marshall McLuhan Initiative, St. Paul’s College, University of Manitoba

RJ (Richard) J Osicki  Director, The Marshall McLuhan Initiative, St. Paul’s College; Lecturer, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg

Mark D Stahlman  Seminar Facilitator, The Marshall McLuhan Initiative; Founder and Managing Partner of TMT Strategies, LLC, Brooklyn

Details

On Campus  May 7, 2011 at 9:30 am
Room 258, St. Paul’s College (Mauro Centre), University of Manitoba (free parking)

Online  from July 11, 2011
www.technologyandreligion.net

Fees
On Campus  Includes free subscription to Online version
All day $149.00
Morning only $99.00

Online  Two-year subscription $39.00

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